

IN THE CLAIMS:

The claims of record are as follows:

1-11 are cancelled without prejudice

12. (Previously presented) A network system comprising:

individual service provider devices (14A, 14B, 14C) each having a first authentication server (22) and access point terminals (20A, 20B, 20C) to which user terminals (50, 52) of users who contract a corresponding one of the individual service provider devices are connected, the access point terminals connecting the user terminal to a network;

a parallel service provider device (16) connected to the network and the individual service provider devices (14A, 14B, 14C), the parallel service provider device having a roaming contract with the individual service provider devices and including a second authentication server (32) and no access point terminal; and

wherein each of the individual service provider devices (14A, 14B, 14C) comprises:

determining means for determining (S6) whether a user who issues a connection request from a user terminal connected to one of the access point terminals is a contracted member of the parallel service provider device;

transmitting means for transmitting (S14) the connection request to the parallel service provider device (16) to cause the second authentication server (32) of the parallel services provider device (16) to perform user authentication when the user is the contracted member;

authentication means for causing the first authentication server (22) of the individual service provider devices (14A, 14B, 14C) to perform user authentication (S8) when the user is not the contracted member; and

connecting means for connecting the user terminal connected to one of the access point terminals to the network and charging the user for connection when a result of user authentication is good (S10, S18).

13. (Previously presented) The network system according to claim 12, wherein

the connection request comprises an e-mail address including a domain name of the parallel service provider device, and

the determining means determines whether the user is a contracted member based on the presence or absence of the domain name of the parallel service provider device in the connection request.

14. (Previously presented) The network's system according to claim 12, wherein the parallel service provider device is connected to the individual service provider devices through an exclusive line.

15. (Previously presented) The network system according to claim 12, wherein the individual service provider devices send respective user connection logs to the parallel service provider device.

16. (Previously presented) The network system according to claim 12, wherein the parallel service provider device comprises:

receiving means for receiving a user name for a user terminal of a user who requests a signup; and

further determining means for determining whether e-mail addresses including a combination of the input user name and sub-domains of the parallel service provider device has been registered so as to register one of non-registered e-mail addresses.